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## **Empowering Cultural Literacy through Course Design and Internet Resources**

Li-Hsueh Hsieh\*

### **Abstract**

Cultural literacy is a popular issue that has recently been promoted in the field of cross-cultural communication. The integration of cultural literacy into college curriculum design is of increasing importance for preparing undergraduates to understand their local resources and introducing them to foreign tourists for potential communicative opportunities. This paper aims to demonstrate how cultural literacy can be enhanced among freshmen by assigning them to report on local historic sites and traditional foods, as was done in the Tourism English course at a university in southern Taiwan. Data included a project report, a teacher's reflection and a student interview. Fifty-two students were divided into 14 groups and were asked to report on their exploration of a historical site and its traditional foods, chosen from a website. They described the food and recorded the integration of language and culture on a PPT. After presenting their reports in class, the students were required to fill out a questionnaire on their attitudes toward the course design and the assignment requirements. The findings revealed high satisfaction (an average of 4.6 out of 5 on the Likert Scale for 13 questions about the class curriculum)

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\* Li-Hsueh Hsieh, Associate Professor, Department of English, National University of Tainan  
Mail : lihsueh953@yahoo.com.tw  
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among the students who participated in the program. The teacher and students stated that they had benefited from obtaining cultural literacy, that they had cooperated well with each other, and that each student had made significant contributions to the successful completion of the team project. Pedagogical implications associated with cultural literacy in an English as a foreign language (EFL) learning context are summarily presented.

**Keywords: College English, cultural literacy, Internet resources, tourism  
English**

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## 結合網路資源與課程設計以增強文化識讀能力

謝麗雪\*

### 摘要

促進文化識讀能力是近來流行的一個溝通議題。本研究目的為利用課程結合網路與當地資源，讓大學生了解文化識讀能力，例如本土觀光景點、傳統食物，且在介紹的過程中，利用對話設計，模擬與外國觀光客用英語溝通的機會，以獲得最佳的互動學習效果。研究對象為南台灣一所大學選修觀光英語課程的五十二位一年級學生，分成十四個小組，結合在網路上所搜尋到的傳統小吃以及實地介紹景點與食物，一一報告他們所選擇的觀光景點探究結果。學生用影片整合與紀錄語言以及文化的資訊，在課堂中報告完後，必須填寫一份共 13 題的問卷，問卷的內容關於他們對於此門課課程設計和老師作業要求的態度。本研究收集的資料包括觀光景點與食物的報告、老師想法及學生意見。利用 EXCEL 統計問卷答案。綜合結果顯示，此門課程及報告作業大受歡迎，因為統計所有參與這次計畫學生所填的答案，達到李克特五等尺度量表平均 4.6 的分數。此外，受訪老師和學生們表示，與他人合作，以及如何為了成功地完成團體報告，盡全力做有意義的貢獻，這些過程使他們受益良多。本文提供外語教學老師文化識讀能力教學的參考與建議。

**關鍵字：**大學英語課程、文化識讀能力、網路資源、觀光英語

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\* 謝麗雪，國立台南大學英語學系副教授

電子信箱：lihsueh953@yahoo.com.tw

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## Introduction

The ideal situation to learn a foreign language is to be immersed in the local cultural environment, to have direct interaction with foreigners, or to get relative information. However, constrained with financial aids, most students can only learn cultural lessons in class. In other words, they can be complemented with knowledge for the lack of experience (Yen, 2006). The most effective way to learn a foreign language is to lead students to learn cultural lessons systematically. It is interesting to observe the differences between two cultures, especially at the cultural lessons. Being aware of the differences helps to expand students' vision and identify their own cultural features because they may adjust and shift their ideology of understanding the cultural variation (Yen, 2006). Cultural cognition looks like a base which promotes understanding and accepting differences. Yen (2006) found her students mostly confirm the value of learning cultural lessons as they help them to learn a foreign language, French. Accordingly, Yen proposed to consider the learning to be oriented to introducing our culture to foreigners. Good (2006) used six episodes of "Friends," the popular comedy series, to teach students cultural themes and images with great effect. Such activity helps students to understand authentic American culture as well. Plenty of excellent cultural icons can be found on the Internet. However, Good did not indicate to what extent students really appreciate or acquire cultural literacy from the course. This provided the investigator with an interest to explore the topic, pursuing cultural literacy.

Cultural literacy is an important motivator for students learning foreign languages, enabling students to match content with language learning efficiently, especially when integrated into the curriculum task design.

Likewise, the presentation of native cultural literacy in English can promote opportunities to practice English. One of the ways of introducing cultural literacy is the integration of culture with language material. Other methods include the use of different language-learning implements, such as video tapes or movies, and the development of rich extracurricular activities (Sun, 2004). In other words, English cultural background knowledge can help students master the English language.

Task-based teaching is a useful means of encouraging students to work cooperatively. It can increase student engagement and comprehension by making lessons more interactive and relevant to the group's work (Lytovchenko, 2009). For example, students can share personal experiences in creative tasks and projects (Willis, & Willis, 2007). Although Ur (1996) pointed out that speaking is, by nature, the most important skill, foreign language learners nonetheless face significant challenges in learning to speak English. Integrating oral communication skills into English classes may help to promote communicative competence (Yun, 2009). In interactive classes, students write for audiences in real world settings with specific purposes, and they are more likely to participate in spontaneous and authentic group conversations (Brown, 1994). However, the nature of the interactions between tasks and learners can affect the original teaching objectives (Murphy, 2003). Teachers should carefully design tasks to make lessons more interactive.

It is known that students differ in their learning processes, comprehension and perceptions in acquiring cultural literacy and skills. Understanding students' perceptions is crucial to the process of teaching and learning because students are often highly motivated and actively engaged when doing activities they prefer (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009). According to

Reid (1987), the learning preferences of non-native speakers may affect curriculum design and teacher training. In Taiwan, however, the two important macrostrategies of “making the learning tasks stimulating” and “familiarizing learners with L2-related culture” have been insufficiently adopted in classes (Cheng, & Dornyei, 2007). Students generally lack the motivation to study English.

This paper reports on the learning attitudes of university English majors toward the cultural projects of a course. The study aims to identify students’ learning preferences, how they perceive the curriculum design, how they prefer to manage the cultural information, and how they demonstrate the knowledge related to the course requirements. The assignment asked students to share their experiences in understanding culture cooperatively. The results were expected to produce a better understanding of English majors’ learning preferences and consequently to encourage teachers to be mindful of these preferences by designing their curricula with appealing materials and methods. Although research shows that the cooperative approach can improve students’ social skills and learning attitudes (Wei & Chen, 1993), little research has been conducted on the use of cooperative learning with the specific purpose of learning English.

This study therefore aims to determine the learning attitudes toward and the effects of the course “Tourism in English”. The research questions are as follows:

First, what are the students’ general attitudes toward the course “Tourism in English”?

Second, what is the instructor’s attitude toward the course?

Third, what do students know about Tainan’s food and historic places?

Fourth, what do students learn from the culture project?

## Literature Review

This section presents a brief review of related literature, including a discussion of cultural literacy, cooperative learning and multimedia applications.

### **Cultural Literacy**

There are various definitions of cultural literacy. According to the Literacy Company, cultural literacy “is about reading... in its widest sense. It is about understanding the meaning of words based on a background of common knowledge that enables one to make sense of what is read.” In most cases, cultural literacy is defined as interaction and reflection on a culture made up of idioms, allusions and informal content which appear in one’s fluent conversation. Cultural literacy requires being familiar with an extent of trivia and application of the trivia in order to create a communal language and collective knowledge (Wikipedia, 2011). For Trent (2008), cultural literacy basically informs one of what is needed to reasonably converse or interact with one’s acquaintances, which is valuable such as to gain indirect financial dividends. Good (2006) claimed that learners should acquire cultural literacy, which means “the background knowledge shared by speakers of a speech community or society and referred to without explanation in speaking and writing” (p.168) in order to completely understand the culture. All in all, cultural literacy is related to people’s successful communication, especially cross-cultural interaction.

Advantages exist in understanding other cultures. First, our society will gain more contributions from getting in touch with more practice, ideas and people. Second, we are benefited for getting more self-understanding with alternatives for our implicit beliefs (Stigler, Gallimore, & Hiebert, 2000).

Third, cultural literacy can also assist the successful cooperation with other people. Fourth, one can get more effective communication and avoid misunderstanding. Fifth, one can understand what one read or hears in the target language more deeply (Good, 2006). Six, one can accumulate several specific and fixed facts to satisfy basic educational goals, create better citizens, help the disadvantaged, and improve the American educational system (Hirsch, 1987). The merits of cultural literacy vary according to the individual to a great extent.

Hirsch's reducing knowledge into a simple list contains the following flaws:

First, it can not achieve what it intends to achieve. Second, we cannot make everyone the same by forcing them into one mold. Third, literacy lists deprive students of the very choices they will exercise as soon as they are freed from school. Besides, Trent (2008) doubted the value of pursuing a considerable amount of cultural literacy, which depends on various factors, for example, situation, values, working environment, and so on. The speakers tend to assume that the audience should possess the cultural literacy emphasized in their conversation, which is not necessarily true, especially in cross-cultural communication. Sometimes misunderstanding may occur just because of the unawareness of cultural literacy. In order to avoid such embarrassing situations from happening, Trent suggested several ways to improve cultural literacy. One is to look up anything one is unaware of and the other is to read as much as possible any materials worth reading. One should strive to improve cultural literacy so as to avoid misunderstanding.

### **Cooperative Learning**

Students' emotional state can influence the effectiveness of learning another language (Chou, 2005). Various teaching approaches have been



promoted in an effort to lower students' negative affective barriers. For example, class activities that consider students' affective perceptions and positive qualities are believed to encourage student motivation and participation (Chou, 2005). Such activities also emphasize group bonding in a class, where the students' cooperative spirit can determine the quality of the course (Senior, 1997). Senior claimed that "if any small group is to develop into a mature work group capable of functioning productively, all group members must share the same broad group goal" (p. 5). Teachers, moreover, can show emotional attachment by acting as friends and playing integral parts in the learning process to create a cohesive atmosphere and to develop the students' linguistic proficiency through oral practice (Senior, 1997). This learning environment, involving a general group development objective and a specific pedagogic goal, is similar to the environment featuring cooperative learning.

Cooperative learning refers to a situation where students work together to complete a common objective that is mutually beneficial (Huang & Lin, 2004). It emphasizes the effect of social behavior on educational interaction and communication (Wei & Chen, 1993) and can be implemented in various formats, including group investigation (Hsieh, 2009), literature circles (Lang, 2007), and so on. The success of cooperative learning lies in features such as heterogeneous grouping, positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal skills and group processing (Huang & Lin, 2004). Its success also depends on active student learning and professional teacher guidance (Wei & Chen, 1993). "Tasks designed to promote complexity of language might benefit from pair or group interaction...Groups of learners may also reinterpret tasks by reacting to each other's contributions in a way that pushes the task in unforeseen directions"

(Murphy, 2003: 354). The implementation of tasks for cooperative learning can result in unexpected learning effects.

Cooperative learning has been beneficial for college English classes. Hsieh (2009) demonstrated the effect of cooperative learning in a linguistic project, where students previewed various films of commercials and songs before they reached a consensus. This study helped students reflect on their feelings, expand their imagination and develop critical skills. Furthermore, it demonstrated the importance of cooperation in accessing Internet resources. Wei and Chen (1993) found that in college English classes that relied on cooperative learning, a majority of students practiced more, had more confidence, and made greater progress, particularly with vocabulary, listening and speaking. Half of the students also improved their abilities to conceptualize, maintain positive attitudes, and interact effectively with classmates. Lang (2007) also pointed out the effect of using cooperative learning in a literature-reading community. Because the last two studies were carried out in the classroom, it is unknown whether the same effect would hold for a group project on a field trip.

### **Application of Multimedia**

Multimedia, which grew in prominence in the late 1980s, refers to software that combines communication elements such as video, sound, text and graphics, all of which serve as good language learning tools and self-study resources. The effectiveness of multimedia is increased by a number of features: the combination of media, content quantity, computer power, learner control, economics, skill stimulation, and motivational qualities (Brinton, 2001). The use of satellite TV news programs in the English language classroom, for example, can create opportunities for students to master their four-skills proficiency because news stories are

among the easiest and most authentic materials for teachers to access. Other advantages of multimedia include availability, differences in length, authentic language, varieties of language, contextual help for comprehension and educational value (Katchen, 1994). Teachers can use silent viewing or viewing with sound, and they can ask students to write summary reports that call on them to reflect on their own learning and understanding of how news stories can serve as effective learning tools (Katchen, 1994).

A wide variety of methods exist for media use in the second language classroom. Brinton (2001) discusses two kinds of media in particular. One is the “large M” media of technological innovations in language teaching, and the other is non-mechanical aids, either commercially available or teacher-made. Media also helps to motivate students in real life by presenting rich cultural information in context. Teachers agree that media can and does enhance language teaching and that the integration of audiovisual media and print media in lessons can create unique advantages (Brinton, 2001).

Rapid developments in applying telecommunications to education, such as computer-assisted language learning, are taking place in western countries. It is possible that multimedia applications may dominate the future of computer-assisted language learning. According to a report on popular science media usage (Yang, & Chen, 2009), Taiwanese university students spent over two hours a day using different kinds of media, among which the Internet was the most popular. These forms of multimedia would therefore serve as convenient tools to facilitate students’ cooperative learning on English projects.

According to Lin, many teachers of culture “seldom used media such as TV commercials, TV programs, or films to facilitate their cultural teaching” (Lin, 2004, p. 608), even though they could use films, for example, to train

students' listening ability. Films often contain realistic language, visually communicated meanings of words, and interesting, authentic contexts that can help to develop students' values, attitudes, and feelings. The audio-visual effects in films can impress learners more vividly and effectively and can activate a greater cultural awareness than other materials, such as newspapers and audio tapes. Lin (2004) suggested that cultural knowledge should be gradually integrated into curricula and that the integration of films and articles into the learning process can create the most effective means of learning culture. In this study, students were encouraged to describe a cultural item related to ppt presentation or articles to motivate their cultural learning.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

The population of the study consisted of 52 freshmen studying in the English Department at a university in southern Taiwan. Of these students, 49 were female and only three were male. The instructor and eight students who completed the interview were all female.

### **The Curriculum Design**

**Materials.** The textbook used for this course was *Talk about Travel*, which included topics related to English used for airlines, hotels and tours. The textbook contained authentic materials (documents). Each lesson contained vocabulary, dialogue, and reading comprehension. Students could use either true or false questions or the listening detection test for their learning materials. The book also contained a unit on food and beverage service, which the teacher tried to connect with famous, historic places that are worth recommending to tourists. The course design included a midterm, a

final exam, and two role-play presentations. Students in groups were asked to create a conversation describing a historic place and its associated food. In class, students were required to learn important words and conversations related to tourism. The teachers also provided outside readings in the form of handouts so that students could gain concrete ideas about tourism.

**Project of the curriculum.** The project called for students to describe a famous historic place or famous food related to Tainan City. Students chose from a list of seven places (祀典武廟、億載金城、延平郡王祠、延平老街、赤崁樓、孔廟、五妃廟) and seven foods (擔仔麵、虱目魚粥、豆腐冰、蜜餞、棺材板、安平豆花、蝦卷). Students playing the roles of the locals showed a PowerPoint presentation (ppt) about the place or food to a foreigner (also played by a student). All characters involved created the dialogues and showed their scripts on the screen. Each of the 14 groups included three to four students who presented their topics, including their work distribution, for about 20 minutes.

The deadline for the project was the sixteenth week of the course. Student group leaders coordinated the work, including the invention of a story related to what had been learned.

### **Instrument**

For data collection, the investigator leading this study developed three tools. The “Tourism in English questionnaire” contained 13 multiple-choice questions and an open-ended section for students to provide suggestions. A 5-point Likert-type scale was used in this study, with 1 being equivalent to “strongly disagree”, 2 to “disagree”, 3 to “so-so”, 4 to “agree”, and 5 to “strongly agree”. The questionnaire, which was written in Chinese, was related to the course content, needs, teacher’s attitude, teaching methods, related materials, class atmosphere, equipment, teacher’s assistance, difficulty

level, correlation with the exam, professional enrichment, grading, time allocation and recommendations for the course. Table 1 presents the English version of the questionnaire.

The second tool was a series of 12 open-ended interview questions for the instructor. It was narrated in English and focused on the instructor's experience, such as the length of time spent teaching tourism. It also included questions on teaching principles, textbook quality, advantages and disadvantages of the course, the process of the group assignment, outstanding projects, students' efforts, and harvests from this course and suggestions for future changes (see appendix A).

Similarly, the third tool was a series of 11 open-ended interview questions for the students. Conducted in English, the interview focused on the students' reasons for choosing the course, textbook quality, advantages and disadvantages of the course, the process of group assignments, projects, student efforts, future career plans, harvests from this course and suggestions for future changes (see appendix B).

### **Data Collection Process and Data Analysis**

The investigator leading this study distributed the questionnaire to the instructor, who administered the survey, collected questionnaire A, and returned the completed questionnaires to the investigator. She then interviewed the instructor and eight randomly selected students about the course. Before completing the questionnaires and interview, the investigator informed the instructor and the students of the aims and the significance of the study and asked them to give honest responses. The whole class completed the questionnaire in ten minutes, while the instructor and eight students took about 20 minutes for their interview questions.

The data for questionnaire A were analyzed using Excel with a focus on

descriptive analysis, tabulating frequency (f), percentage (%), average (A), and standard deviations (SD). Items 1-12 contained only a percentage. As no one chose *strongly disagree* for any of the items in Table 1, that section was omitted to save space. In addition, responses by the instructor and eight students that illustrated statistical data were transcribed, logged into the computer, and synthesized into patterned phrases or terms significant to the study questions. The teacher's answers were marked with (T), and the students' (S with a number).

Validity can be obtained in various ways, such as the triangulation of methods (e.g. interview, observation, and document analysis), data (different formats), investigators (professors, interviewees, and theory (using the collected data) to decide consistency within different data (Wu & Lee, 1995). In this paper, two kinds of interview (teacher & students) and questionnaires as well as report were applied. The investigator tried to contrast different viewpoints to reach the opinion consensus of the course effect.

Besides, various resources such as the researcher's role, the selection of the informants, social context, and analysis can be applied to enhance reliability and validity (Chen, 2005). Reliability relies on the three factors: evaluation tools (e.g. objectives, sampling, items, instruction, testing questions), situation and personal factors (Cohen, 1994). In this study subjects were not tested with English linguistic knowledge, but the experience of learning related to culture (food and historic place), a topic related to their daily life. The 13 questions clearly required students to provide ideas about the courses all the subjects participated. The situation was appropriate, and students selected the course and the investigated topic in terms of their personal will. Students could freely answer and access the information. Under these conditions, the evaluation tool should be reliable

(Cohen, 1994).

## **Results and Discussion**

This section contains two sections in order to answer research questions 1 to 4. The first section focuses on curriculum, the teacher, and interaction, and the second section focuses on materials, equipment, and learning effects.

### **Curriculum, the Teacher, and Interaction**

According to Table 1, almost all of the students (98.1%) considered that the lecture conformed to the teaching outline. They also approved of the teacher's attitude, methods, supplemental materials and grading system. They agreed that the atmosphere and interaction between the teacher and students were good, that the teacher gave appropriate answers to questions, and they would recommend the course to other students.



**Table 1** Distribution of Responses to the Questionnaire

Items	N = 53	%	SA	A	N	D	T	M	SD
1. Did the lecture conform to the teaching outline?			60.4	37.7	1.9	0	243	4.6	14.7
2. Did the lecture conform to your needs?			60.4	30.2	5.7	0	243	4.6	14.7
3. Do you approve of the teacher's teaching attitude?			69.8	28.3	1.9	0	248	4.7	16.1
4. Do you approve of the teacher's teaching method?			67.9	30.2	1.9	0	247	4.7	15.7
5. Were the interaction and atmosphere between teacher and students good?			75.5	22.6	1.9	0	251	4.7	17.2
6. Did the teacher give extra supplements outside the syllabus?			79.2	18.9	1.9	0	253	4.8	18
7. Was the equipment used commensurate with the teaching needs?			60.4	35.8	1.9	1.9	241	4.5	14.4
8. Did the teacher give appropriate answers to the student's questions?			62.3	35.8	1.9	0	244	4.6	14.9
9. Did the lecture fit your level of proficiency?			62.3	30.2	7.5	0	241	4.5	14.1
10. Was the test designed according to the lecture?			67.9	28.3	3.8	0	246	4.6	15.5
11. Did this course enhance your professional ability?			64.2	32.1	3.8	0	244	4.6	14.9
12. Do you agree with the teacher's grading system?			64.2	34.0	1.9	0	245	4.6	15.2
13. Would you recommend this course to your classmates?			Yes = 98.2		Not sure = 1.9		Total average = 4.6		

*Note.* SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; N = Neutral; DA = Disagree, T = Total scores; M = average scores; SD = Standard Deviation.

In the open-ended answers, ten students thought that the course was vivid, interesting, and not overly serious, while nine students appreciated the teacher's earnest teaching attitude and her professionalism. Three students saw the teacher as cordial and friendly, while one student emphasized the good interaction between the teacher and students.

The instructor's description of her own background matched well with students' opinions:

I enjoy traveling and have been to many foreign countries. I also have five years experience teaching college students Tourism in English. I therefore possess a lot of knowledge about the subject and I share my practical experience, along with theory, with students in my class. (T)

The advantages and disadvantages of other courses identified by the teacher confirmed why students would highly recommend the course to other students:

In comparison with other courses, this course was easier and much more fun. Students were therefore much more motivated to learn. Students also benefited from this course not only in terms of learning about tourism but also in that they gained practical travel experience and learned about foreign cultures. Not all students were able to practice the activities, however, and the chosen textbook was a bit too easy for them. (T)

Some students pointed out the reasons why they enjoyed the class and some shortcomings of the class.

The teacher often shared with us her travel experiences and told us strange and funny things that captured our interest and this inspired me to start dreaming of traveling around the world one day. (S7)

There were too many students in the class for us to have good teaching quality. (S7)

The following perception illustrates the positive atmosphere and high quality of interaction between the instructor and the students:

According to my teaching experience, the students here definitely did a much better job than students in other schools. The students here showed initiative and discipline, and they were also very creative. Their English ability was high and they were very affable. (T)

Two students expressed positive comments about the teacher's instruction in class:

Yes, the teacher was interactive to the point that she could raise students' learning motivation to learn. I did not spend too much time on the class. My own grade was average and I was satisfied with that grade. (S5)

We did a good job in the class because we could learn things and had fun. Of course I made an effort in the class. I would give myself 90 points. I was satisfied with my grade. (S6)

This section confirms what Lytovchenko (2009) claimed that interactive and relevant tasks helped student engagement and comprehension in lessons

because they were highly motivated and actively involved in preferred activities, just as Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) contended as well as Yun's (2009) statement, oral communicative skills help to promote communicative competence. Students had more confidence to communicate with others in the learning tasks.

### **Materials, Equipment, and Learning Effects**

Table 1 shows that a very high percentage of students (96.2%) believed that the materials and equipment met teaching needs, the test related well to the lectures, and the course enhanced their professional ability.

The open-ended answers supported the above statement. Seven students thought the syllabus and extra supplements were very useful. Furthermore, three students liked the various activities the teacher planned, such as listening, reading, conversations, and acting. Three other students hoped the teacher could teach similar courses in the future. Two students thought that the range of material being taught was accessible to them and that they could absorb it immediately.

The instructor's teaching principles and the textbook she used were appropriate for her course design:

I used "Talk About Travel" as my textbook. I think this is a good book for students with lower English abilities or for a single-semester course. I don't think it is a very good choice for students at this university, however, because it appears to be too easy for them. I therefore had to provide students with supplements. I would like students to have chances to use the language and to practice it. (T)

A student expressed her ideas about the textbook as follows:

I think it is a useful book because it is not too difficult, but we can still learn some useful words and learn about tourism from it. (S6)

Most students felt that the course content met their needs (94.4%) and that the difficulty level was right for them (92.5%).

In the open-ended answers, five students thought they learned a lot from this course, especially in terms of tourism knowledge and new vocabulary. They also improved their speaking and presentation skills. Four participants considered this course to be an outstanding one with no shortcomings and thought that the teacher was fair and just.

Moreover, the rich curriculum design for the course, including the interesting group project, had a favorable impression on the instructor and students, and their comments reflect the course's popularity:

Students in class had to learn four skills related to tourism. Each chapter provided activities and students were asked to perform the activities in pairs. Students were also asked to form groups and to conduct assignments according to the guidelines.

The group project was announced at the beginning of the course. Students were informed of the grading system and were asked to form their own groups to prepare for this project. Then, they had to choose a group leader to do the coordinating. After class, they had to meet to discuss the details of their project. During the class, they were frequently reminded of the project deadline. Each group leader played

an important role because he/she had to coordinate the members, monitor progress, and integrate the project. If the leaders encountered any difficulties, they would ask for the teacher's help. Most students used the Internet or field trips to get the material or information required and prepared the project accordingly. (T)

Some students were very creative and did a great job on the project. They were well-prepared and performed well. For example, one group focused on Tainan's local delicacies. The group members visited stores, interviewed the store owners, took pictures of the merchandise and even brought some samples back to the classroom for presentation. That was very impressive. (T)

One member in the group commented making effects for this project in a happy tone.

Our theme is icy tofu [豆腐冰]. We went to the store to eat and interviewed the store owner. We also took photos, made a ppt and did a role play in class. We spent about five to seven days working on this project. I learned that every job has its difficulties. It was not easy to find free time to visit the store and do the project. I think I did a good job because I spent a lot of time and put in a lot of effort. Yes, it was a wonderful experience. I enjoyed the project because we had so much fun. (S6)

Nevertheless in the future, the course might be conducted differently due

to the instructor's concerns such as the following:

There are too many students in the classroom. It is so difficult for all students to participate in every activity, so it would be better to cut down the number of students in the class. (T)

I will ask students to make their project presentations on video instead of in class. I think it would be amazing to see students' performances in that way. (T)

Students also gave similar opinions on improving the project:

I would do a project on successful stores and read more relevant information. (S8)

The teacher should give students more time to finish their work. Three to four students per group would be better. With too many students assigned to a group, one of them might be lazy and not do anything. The learning efficiency scale for such a student would therefore be too low. (S2)

In answering to question 3, students made general comments and defined Tainan's culture of food and historic places based on 1. facts and figures, 2. characteristics 3. history and 4. values. Table 2 shows the comments on the project.

**Table 2 The Cultural Literacy Students Have Learned from the Project**

Items	Before the culture project	After the culture projects
General comments	Nothing/not much	A lot/quite a bit
Facts and figures	The food is traditional	The food is diverse
Characteristics	Friendly/conservative	Not rushed, polite, serious
History	Old	Diverse and rich, deep, different priorities
Values		Proud of their culture, sense of pride and tradition, maintain historical outlook of cities for esthetic reasons, environmentally aware

After the engagement of the culture project, students modified their concepts by recognition of more elements involved in the experience. They showed clearer terms to describe the culture experience. They expanded their statements when explaining values by incorporating information gained from the visitation of the websites or the target places for investigation.

The answers to question 4 are interesting. They showed that students developed more cultural awareness after doing the project. Before doing the project about the culture, most claimed to know less about Tainan's food and historic places, but after it, students had adequate challenges and modify their ideas by feeling to learn something new. However, some students reported to



have maintained their previous knowledge. After reflection, some students incorporated new insights into their understanding of culture.

The process changed some of the students' beliefs. This study revealed that after doing the project, most students were able to perceive culture from different perspectives; they reflected a developing sensitivity to diversity within the culture; and demonstrated an awareness of long-term process of cultural learning. Conducting interviews with students made the learning process more engaging, relevant, and interesting for the students. Besides, through the cooperative learning, students could be aware of the diversity of their opinions and reevaluate their views of cultures. Doing the questionnaire also helped to increase students' processing of information to a conscious level.

This section echoes Brown's (1994) points of view that students write for a specific purpose in the real world, and create spontaneous and authentic conversation. Contrary to Cheng and Dornyei's (2007) ideas, the instructor in this study tried to create stimulating tasks and made students learn by using familiar culture. Indeed, learners' interaction with tasks had a great impact on the teachers' original objective, and in this study, it was positive. The cooperative learning in an outfield project also improved social skills and learning attitudes, which corresponds to Wei and Chen's (2003) viewpoint. Students' mutual goal in the cooperative project determines the quality of the courses (Huang & Lin, 2004; Senior, 1997). In addition, this result confirmed Good's (2006) and Yen's (2006) proposal that cultural intelligence including images, themes, values and attitudes need to be taught explicitly, but students can develop an awareness of and appreciation for culture through curriculum design with cultural literacy. Lin (2004) was right to suggest filling English courses with cultural literacy, as can be seen from the pleasure that the

students derived from this course. No wonder students gave a high evaluation of the course.

Similar to Abrams's (2002) study that Internet-based culture portfolios bring students' views of other cultures into the L2 classroom. The project in this study increased students' acquisition of new cultures from a different perspective. Studying food and historic places from our culture in the language class provide many advantages: It offers a springboard for discussion of the students' own culture. These activities also positively alter the classroom atmosphere, creating students' curiosity and decreasing the affective filter to language learning. Students were exposed to important cultural and historical information in a much diverse way than only reading or listening to lectures (Abrams, 2002).

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The purpose of this study was to explore how students' cultural awareness developed through participation in the Internet-mediated culture projects. The outcomes showed that the usage of the Internet could benefit tracing the cultural resources and facilitating the process of understanding the complex, dynamic attitudes, views, and practices. Furthermore, the general attitude of the whole class toward the "Tourism in English" course was positive, and the attitudes of the instructor and the eight student interviewees confirmed this. They demonstrated this through their enthusiastic responses to the following two sections: (1) curriculum, teacher, and interaction, and (2) materials, equipment, and learning effect. The course design and group project proved to be useful for students to learn cultural literacy in a cooperative and constructive way.

The results indicate that the instructor's curriculum design played an important role in the course's success. According to the Literacy Company, one can become more culturally literate by reading about different subjects. The more one can understand what is read, the more enjoyable reading becomes and the more culturally literate one becomes. It is simple to infer that if the subjects go to the website to find information more often, they get more cultural knowledge.

Language is the symbol of recording culture and learning a foreign language can be considered as learning a second culture. "Students can use knowledge cognition to complement insufficient experience" (Yen, 2006, p.224). The cultural literacy depends on the social context and objectives, which refers to literacy practices or literacy events. (Health, 1983, cited in Buckingham, 2006, p.49). This indicates that individuals cannot create meaning, but rely on social network and promoted by interpretative communities (Buckingham, 2006). The curriculum design focused on knowledge transmission. Discovery and exploration are the best way for learning, and students are responsible for their own learning. However, the individual ability and interest should be respected (Ou, 1994).

On the other hand, the humanistic consideration of setting up group work to create a positive atmosphere could, in fact, promote the motivation to learn and improve the learning effect. However, the amount of class time spent on group work might be reduced by showing each group's previously constructed DVD in class. The students' integration of audiovisual media and print media can create great benefit in learning culture (Brinton, 2001). In the future, the instructor could also encourage students to use the Internet as a resource for their presentation content and to learn computer skills that would help them present their topic clearly. Students might also design websites

about historic places with famous food or drinks with supplemental conversations and role plays, which may prove to be equally motivational activities for the course “Tourism in English”. Above all, the pre-test and post-test method will be applied in the future study in order to compare the learning effect.

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## Appendix A

**The Interview questions are set up for enquiring the instructor's perception of teaching the course "Tourism in English"**

1. What related background experience of tourism do you own?
2. How long have you taught the class "Tourism in English"?
3. What are your teaching principles for the course?
4. What textbook did you use? Is it a good choice? Why or why not?
5. What were the advantages of the courses did you find?
6. What were the disadvantages of the courses did you find?
7. What did students do in class and grading proportion for the activities did you assign for their final grades?
8. How did you process the group project? What did the students do for the project? Where did they get the materials or information for the project?
9. Are there any impressive projects from the class? What are they about?
10. Compared with students in other schools, did the students here did a better job in the class? Why or why not?
11. What will you do differently for the class in the future?
12. Do you have other comments or suggestions?

## Appendix B

### **The Interview questions are set up for enquiring the students' perception of taking the course "Tourism in English"**

1. Why did you choose the course tourism in English?
2. What textbook did you use? Is it a good reference book? Why or why not?
3. What were the advantages of the courses did you find?
4. What were the disadvantages of the courses did you find?
5. What did students do in class and grading proportion for the activities did you need to do for the final grades?
6. What was the theme of your project? What did you and classmates do for the project? How did you distribute your work? Where did you get the materials or information for the project? How long did it take you to finish it? What did you learn from doing this project? What were the difficulties confronted from this project? Did you do a good job, why or why not? Is the group project a wonderful experience? Did you enjoy doing the presentation, why or why not?
7. Are there any impressive projects from your classmates? What are they about?
8. Compared with students in other courses, did the students here do a better job in the class? Why or why not? Did you make efforts in this class? How many grades will you give yourself (1-100)? Are you satisfied with your final grade?
9. What will you do differently for the class in the future if you have the chance?
10. What are the harvests of culture learning obtained from this course?

11. Do you have other comments or suggestions for students or teacher who will take or give the class in the future?